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ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS

Committee on
Regional Planning

BACKGROUND

Some two years ago, in the earliest stages of the discussions which ultimately led to the formation of the Association of Bay Area Governments, one of the prime purposes discussed for forming such an organization was the possibility of developing regional planning for the San Francisco Bay Area. There were many criticisms of the independent courses being followed by various agencies--the Rapid Transit District, the Air Pollution Control District, the haphazard development of parks and recreation facilities, the establishment and location of sanitation facilities--each effort was being made by an agency concerned with only one specific problem or with a particular geographical area. No coordinated consideration was being given to the over-all service and welfare of the entire Bay Area. Yet there were recurrent statements of the basic realization that the Bay Area is a single community in a broad sense. These statements were always followed with the observation that only through regional planning could the various efforts be coordinated properly and that regional planning might best be developed under the wing of an association of our local governments.

ABAG became a reality; and as a further expression of the interest in regional planning, its "Committee on Regional Planning" was formed in May of this year. Originally the specific assignment was for the Committee to study AB 2560 (creates Regional Planning Agency), which was then before the State Legislature; but the Committee's assignment was extended almost immediately to consider regional planning for the Bay Area in general and AB 2560 as an incidental part of the over-all task.

The Committee found that there have been efforts to establish regional planning in the Bay Area as far back as 1900 and that at least five organized attempts have been made to establish a formal regional planning agency, with such efforts being organized and directed principally by the planning professionals and commissioners of the area. AB 2560 was the most recent of these efforts; and to oversimplify, its intent was a sincere effort to establish an organized district for regional planning. This district would have possessed taxing authority and would have been governed by representatives of the local government legislators.

AB 2560 was not successful this year in Sacramento, and from various efforts to solicit reactions from members of the State Legislature, we have found little support for this approach to developing regional planning in our Bay Area. Possibly one reason for this is found in a quotation from a report dated July, 1961, now under consideration by the Committee on Government Operations, of the United States House of Representatives and which was prepared by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations that reads as follows: "The concept of a 'metropolitan area plan' is frequently enshrined as a deity to which administrators, politicians and taxpayers generally are expected to render complete and continued obeisance." This observation of the Commission we believe to be true and, we believe, to express the basic reason for our local legislators shunning regional planning by the organized-district approach.

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CONCLUSIONS

The Committee found, however, that the many changing problems within the Bay Area require the development of sensible regional planning. Having determined that (1) a formal regional planning district is not acceptable to the Committee as a solution, the Committee continued with the commitment that (2) the concept of regional planning in the Bay Area is sound and deserves pursuit within the structure of ABAG.

Our discussions developed a clear understanding that proper regional planning should be a cooperative undertaking of a group of politically independent units--our cities and counties--that are contained within the Bay Area and are concerned with its physical features, its social and economic forces. Cooperative regional planning should be advisory and should not require any city or county to follow the regional planning recommendations, but it should provide a general framework to serve as a guide and advisory pattern for each city and county in developing its own program for planning growth and development. A regional planning organization must, in addition, be a clearinghouse for information throughout the entire region. Research programs of the member planning commissions can thus be better coordinated and the information so gathered made available to all planning organizations within the region rather than to the immediate area of the Commission initiating the research program. For example, such specialized studies as those undertaken by the Rapid Transit District and other special districts can be more readily made available to all communities through a regional planning organization. Basic area-wide studies in population, changing economic development, recreational needs, and so forth, can best be handled by a regional planning effort.

The third conclusion of the Committee on Regional Planning has to do with the method by which regional planning might best be sought within the structure of ABAG. It could, of course, first be carried on by a paid staff operating under the immediate direction of the Association Executive Committee and its Secretary. Or, secondly, it might be done by voluntary efforts of the planning technicians and commissions of our various city and county members' staff personnel operating under the direction of a Coordinator, to be found, who would volunteer his time and efforts in bringing together and organizing the vast technical potential to be found among our present member staff personnel.

I should fill out this report with the observation that the Federal Housing Act of 1961 continues and expands the so-called "urban planning assistance program." Under this program two-thirds matching funds are available for the stimulation and encouragement of metropolitan area or regional planning activities. It is possible that the Association might qualify as an agency eligible to receive such planning assistance grants. The Federal Government is concerned with two basic requirements: one, that the program is comprehensive of the entire area and, secondly, that the program will continue after Federal assistance funds are spent. The availability of this Federal money has been brought to the attention of the Committee members by various people who have become aware of our efforts. These people prefer that the tool used for finding the regional planning solution be that of an independent, tightly organized paid staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee does not recommend that ABAG approach regional planning by a paid staff at this time, for it seems inadvisable to burden so new an organization

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RECOMMENDATIONS (Cont.)

with what probably would be heavy budget requirements. The Committee has chosen not to recommend the use of Federal grant money for regional planning at this time for a similar reason--that the successful application for such funds would commit us to staff increases to maintain the regional plan once developed under the Federal grant.

All of this may develop in the months and years ahead of us. The Committee has felt it premature to urge that the Association commit itself now to such financial obligation.

The Committee's recommendation concentrates on the remaining alternative, namely, that of using ABAG as the parent organization within which a volunteer staff would be developed to generate regional planning. Several outstanding citizen residents of the Bay Area have been proposed as Coordinator to direct this project; and at this time, the Committee is interviewing these individuals and discussing the matter with the many planning organizations so that we might find the right person for this exacting task.

One further comment on the course that might be followed in the development of regional planning by this approach is appropriate: We believe that the initial step should be one of establishing an inventory of the many general plans for counties and cities presently available throughout the Bay Area--an inventory in which the many separate plans would be combined into a single presentation of the plans in use today. Once this is accomplished, it would lead naturally into a self-appraisal of shortcomings and inconsistencies that would become apparent, and would lead to discussion and, we believe, action among the individual cities and counties to coordinate their general plans with the regional situation. This again would lead quite naturally into the necessary study being made by which to appraise the future requirements for land use, highways and transportation, regional parks and recreation, and the many other problems which are increasing along with our growing population.

A strong trend of local planning now exists throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. By long exposure and active participation, our city and county governments know what the physical planning job is and, by and large, have established the fact that they are determined to do it well. We believe that the Association of Bay Area Governments can make the greatest possible contribution to effective regional planning by adopting and pursuing the general course charted by this report.

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Since the time that this report was made to the ABAG Executive Committee, we have learned that the Assembly Interim Committee on Municipal and County Government will hold hearings on Wednesday afternoon, October 25, 1961, in San Francisco on the subject of regional planning districts. Unquestionably, this Association should appear at the hearing and should take a forthright position. If the General Assembly approves, this report provides the basis on which an Association policy would be presented to this Interim Committee.

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